

The Future of The B'nai B'rith

A paper read before the Grand Lodge Session of District No. 2 at Louisville, Ky.

By Joseph Leiser.

The call for a new program, something definite to do is the loudest note in our altruistic international order of B'nai B'rith and soon or late every member who cherishes the venerable name, Ben B'rith, will be concerned in ascertaining what role our organization is destined to play in the dramatic unfolding of the future. The world-transforming events through which we have passed will not cast us for the same part as that performed so creditably by our sires. To us is assigned a new character, in the dramatic personae of humanity. He is indeed benighted who does not realize that great changes have taken place in the world. The great motives dominating man, religion, education, industry have shifted their view points. The religious outlook is different. This is so common place an observation one need not argue it. Business and industry are undergoing terrific upheavals as every newspaper reports. The curriculum of schools and colleges is now being subjected to the most radical renovations to meet the new emergencies of this age.

Is it any wonder then, that this little fragment of human endeavor represented by our fraternity, is bound to be affected by the changes that are taking place everywhere? The world today is different than it was in 1917 and far different than it was in 1914. No one dwelling on this foot stool of

God thinks the same thoughts that he entertained, nor views and things in just the same manner those were regarded in those untroubled decades preceding the great conflict.

Dismissing the analysis and explanation for this uprooting of old ideas—a departure in some instances so momentous that one fancies the apocalyptic visions of a new world order ushering in the messianic era—is now being fulfilled. The survey of these gigantic movements are not within the scope of this article. But no one can escape the sweep of these tides in the present world order. In the unsettled conditions of affairs, political as well as industrial, every human being is asking himself: Whither? Collective groups of man are equally concerned in their future: Are we to live or are we to die? as is recited so dolefully in the afternoon Ritual of the Day of Atonement.

Bearing in mind a rabbinical adage which admonishes us to live one day at a time nor to question what will happen in days beyond us, but to do well our part this day, we may safely say that our future is reflected in our past achievements. From our tradition we project the program of our future. What we have done prepared us for what will be done.

The Independent Order B'nai B'rith was founded to promote the highest ideals of humanity and to stimulate among its members the exalted standards of life and living in accordance with the precepts of Jewish tradition. Its objective was Jewish as its ideal sought to inspire the House of Jacob

to adjust itself to the new circumstances of this new country. It advocated the virtues of patriotism and service to the nation and was proud of the privilege granted each to enjoy the blessings of liberty. In every sense of the word it was a missionary movement by Jews unto Jews in which the interests of the Jews were elevated to the interests of humanity.

Steadfastly the Order clung to its purpose and during the seventy-five years of its existence, is credited with having wrought for the glory of American Israel, monuments of philanthropy and mutual helpfulness. This order has undertaken to care for the widow and orphan, for the old and the stricken, without stint or restriction. It has been the valiant champion of Israel in every land where persecution assailed our brethren and bigotry and fanaticism strove to enmesh them.

Generously as these exigencies of other days were met, we are not warranted in presuming that they have ceased to be. In fact these emergencies will always arise. There will always be orphans and widows. Old people will ever wander homeless and unsheltered. Persecutions are not extricated despite Leagues of Nations and Covenants of Peace to stay the clenched fist of oppression. Man's inhumanity to man will make our brethren bleed. Some branch of the fellowship of Israel will be under the shadow of a dreadful night in some part of the world in days to come as they have been in the years that are past. This we may anticipate however loath we are to admit its possibility.

But it is our allotted task as a fraternity to await these disasters and

provide succor when our brethren are overtaken in adversity? Is the purpose of our order, so nobly represented in achievements of humanity to be confined to a continuation of these obligations of brotherly love merely, and project no other paths of labor and fulfillment in the years that are still unborn?

To admit that these objects of philanthropy are sufficient to engage us and wave aside any suggestion for enlarging our sphere of activities with a self-satisfied recognition of what has been accomplished is a sure sign of old age and senility. The founders of our Order wrought heroically and are crowned with praise for their work. The work of their hands has been established. But what of us who are alive this day? What prospects of service do we offer our sons when we lay down our tasks? What unfinished labors awaits them and gives them a cause for which they too can give the full measure of their devotion?

There never was a time when more opportunities address the B'nai B'rith than this new era presents. A career of usefulness is offered it, surpassing any service of humanity which engaged our fathers when poor and strange, they migrated to these shores any by mutually pooling their common claims, organized this institution to Americanize, educate, protect and encourage one another.

The conditions which prevailed in those early years no longer obtain. While for years unnumbered our brethren from other lands will seek our shores, they will not knock at our door for recognition in so large a number nor as eagerly as they did in days of old. Other agencies have been

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